
ALBANIA YESTERDAY AND TODAY

175^x made its appearance in the form of an irredentistic movement, which made its first manifestation in 1878 by the formation of the Albanian League at Prizren under the presidency of Abdul Bey Frasheri, supported by the leader of the Mirdites—Prenek Bib Doda.

175^x It was about the year 1880 that the Turkish
• 668 Government relaxed the interdiction on Albanians, and national societies, with the object of furthering Albanian independence and political autonomy, sprang into existence. The particular work of these organizations was to re-awaken the dormant nationalism of the Albanians, to re-ignite the patriotism of the former centuries.

The rise into power of Sultan Abdul Hamid, surnamed the "Red Sultan," marked the beginning of the persecution of those engaged in the Albanian movement crystallized in these Albanian societies. His Grand Vizier was none other than Ferid Pasha, who, curiously enough, had a deep interest in Albanian politics. At this period, Prenek Bib Doda, the leader of the Mirdites, had been president of the Albanian League. The Red Sultan's bodyguard was composed of Albanian mountaineers. Numerous of the Turkish Grand Viziers,

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politicians, statesmen and high army officers, ⁷⁵ were pure Albanians. These positions of ⁶⁶⁸ importance held by Albanians could not help but rebound to the aid of their country. Thus went forward the movement for independence and prepared the minds of the Albanians for those events which were to take place in the few crowded years just prior to the world war.

In 1908, Sultan Abdul Hamid was informed that he must bow to the inevitable and promulgate the Turkish Constitution, and, thus, usher in the heyday of a new political life in the land of the Shqipetars. In the following year, the Red Sultan strove to overthrow the Constitution, but was frustrated by the Albanians. The Albanians delegated Essad Pasha Toptani to inform Sultan Abdul Hamid that, so far as Albania was concerned, he was dethroned. Although true that this self-government came tragically late, for, alas, fate decreed that only the next day the tables should be turned on the Albanians by the intrigues of their neighbors, however, the seed had been sown and the Albanians had at last started on the path toward independence. Thus, a glorious chapter was closed in preparation for the sordid workings of the European and Balkan diplomacy in Albania.

Rise of Albanian Nationalism



● 668 **N** any discussion of the Albanian policy and the awakening of the dormant spirit of the Albanians, due consideration should be given to the Albanian League (Albanian National League), for it was the one great and dominant force that made for the re-arousing of the ancient Sons of the Eagle, the Shqipetars, to a full sense of their responsibility as loyal countrymen.

175 To possess a complete and just view of the
668 Albanian question, it is necessary to turn back to the days of 1877 and 1878, the period of the great Balkan upheaval occasioned by the Russo-Turkish war. The Albanians were invited by the Montenegrins to join in this war, but the Albanians refused to participate in any conflict. With the close of the war, however, at the convening of the Congress of Berlin, Albania as one of the oppressed nations, brought before that Congress a petition for the full recognition of Albanian nationality and political autonomy. It was this petition that caused the Iron Chancellor,

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Prince von Bismarck, when Lord Salisbury ^{175-X} proposed that some attention be given the ⁶⁶⁸ • Albanian question, to cry out, "there is no Albanian Nationality."

As a result of the Congress of Berlin, Albania was divided quite generously amongst her neighbors, with little regard for national groups or local sentiment.

Not only was this arrangement contrary to the liking of the Albanians, but it was also grossly unfair. The Albanians registered a vigorous protest, which received no attention due to Prince von Bismarck's erroneous statement that there was no Albanian nationality. Not receiving any attention, the Albanians decided, if they were to have any sort of political autonomy, it must come through their own efforts. Thus, to promote the cause of the Albanians as a nationality and to sound to the world the clarion call of the desire of the Albanians for national independence and self-government, the Albanian League for the Defense of the Rights of the Albanian Nationality was organized with headquarters at Prizren.

The first act of the League was to issue a

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175^x protest against the parcelling out of Albanian
● 668 territory.

By reason of the irresistible force of this League, the European powers who were signatories of the Berlin Treaty found it advisable, as well as necessary, to modify their original decision.

Space forbids us to go into details concerning the dealings between the Albanian League and the "Young Turks," whose success was largely due to the Albanian support, 175^x which led up ultimately to the winning of 669 Albanian autonomy. At one time, the "Young Turks" attempted to disarm the northern Albanians, who, by the way, had been their main source of aid in the overthrow and dethronement of the Red Sultan. The loyal Albanians, equal to the occasion, did not bow to the apparently inevitable. In July, 1910, the Albanian chieftains met in Ferizovitch, where they decided that the crying need of the hour was autonomous administration. Insurrections followed, because of the failure of the "Young Turks" to accede to the wishes of the Albanian chieftains. Two attempts were made by the Turks to crush the Albanians; finally, they were, to all appearances, subdued,

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175^x was a great deal of doubt in the minds of many as to the degree of good faith and sincerity to be expected from the Balkan States, however, the important fact was that Albania had been driven to the wall and made to face the crucial test. The Balkan States were repeatedly successful in their military operations and threw the Turks into a wild and disorderly retreat. The whole of Albania was placed under the command of Balkan military leaders, with the one exception of the fortress of Janina. Central and northern Albania was overrun by the Montenegrins and Serbs, while southern Albania was occupied by the Greeks. Forthwith, Albania was treated as a conquered nation, and the occupation was considered a permanent one.

175^x The Albanians were not easily beguiled by wily statesmen, especially when they happened to be Balkans. Even though the darkness of abject slavery seemed to have descended upon them, even when an autonomous Albania seemed but an unsubstantial dream, all this did not prevent them from banding together in a brave effort to defend their own. Only a miracle would be their salvation, and, a miracle man arose in the person of Ismail

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● 668 Qemal Bey Vlora of Valona, an old Albanian leader, who volunteered to use all of his power to bring about the redemption of Albania.

At the beginning of the Balkan invasion Ismail Qemal Bey Vlora was in Constantinople, where he was tendered a seat in the Turkish Ministry, which, by the way, had for its sole purpose the annexation of Albania to the cause of Turkey. However, he refused the offer that he might better devote all his time to the interests of Albania.

Being apprised of the invasion, he resolved to **save** Albania by a "coup de main." Hurriedly leaving Constantinople to preside over a meeting of Albanian leaders at Bucharest, where he received assurances of support of such leaders, he at last arrived in Albania accompanied by a few friends. His first act was to call together at Valona a meeting, and as a direct result thereof, on November 28, 1912, the national emblem, symbolized in a red flag bearing the double-headed black eagle of Scanderbeg, was flown above the city. On the same day he proclaimed the independence of Albania. A provisional government was established with Ismail Qemal Bey Vlora as its president, and a Provisional National

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175⁴ Assembly was commissioned to take care of
661 the enactment of a series of laws for the welfare of Albania.

About this time it came to light that Austria and Italy had been concerned as to the future of Albania as far back as 1900, at which time they entered into an agreement guaranteeing the integrity of Albania, if and when the Turkish Empire be dismembered and Albania assume the position of an independent nation.

This agreement was not generally known to exist, and, in truth, came about through an interchange of notes between the two nations, taking place on the eve of Italy's acceptance of her place in the Entente as against the League of the Central Powers. Some reference is made of this agreement in the Italian Green Book of 1914-1915, and is contained in the seventy-first document of the Green Book. The exact text of the formal agreement is not universally known and, to the knowledge of the author, has not been published. There is some question in regard to whether Ismail Qemal Bey Vlora had any knowledge of the existence of such an agreement, but perhaps he was cognizant of it.

The natural curiosity of the reader will

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and Yugoslavia. The condition of their country was one of relative prosperity; for the Italian occupation had enriched the people, while the recovery of the Kossovo had made supplies of food plentiful and cheap. At the same time the endemic poverty of the Albanians was such that, having little to lose and small hope of acquiring wealth by lawful means, they welcomed disorder whenever it was attended by opportunities of plunder. To this natural lawlessness occasioned by their poverty was added a proud people's impatience of foreign rule. If the Italians had been less in evidence, their occupation might have been more easily tolerated. As it was, the Albanians bitterly resented the intrusions into their daily lives of the ubiquitous *carabinieri*, whose efforts to enforce order among a people accustomed to anarchy were as unpopular as they were vain.

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Besides these general causes of discontent, the one inherent in the circumstances of the Albanians, the other in the character of their conquerors, there were other influences making for unrest of a more local, if no less important, application. In North Albania the mercenary factor in the economy of the tribes made revolt a constant possibility. So rugged indeed was their region, and so complete the absence of social or political inhibitions among them, that the Ghegs could always be provoked to insurrection whenever the expectations of victory or gain appeared commensurate to the risks involved. In South Albania the causes of discontent were of a more usual character and sprang from the naturally conflicting interests of the landless peasants and the *Beys* whose estates they worked. The wretched lot of the Moslem peasantry might be somewhat alleviated by the sense of belonging to the same community as their masters; but the religious distinction which separated the Orthodox *rayah* from the Islamised landowners only served to increase their class consciousness. These Orthodox peasants had long been ripe for revolt; and indeed Fan Noli had sought to exploit their discontent in the revolution of 1924. Now, however, for the first time they found effective leaders in the youth of the towns.

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The spread of Italian influence during the reign of King Zog had encouraged the growth of a new class of officials and

Prologue

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merchants whose children had received a European education, either in the foreign schools that were introduced into Albania, or in their studies abroad. These young men had no roots in landed property or among the tribes and could find no outlet for their energies within the narrow limits of independent Albania such as the Ottoman Empire had offered earlier generations. They were thus peculiarly susceptible to the influence of revolutionary ideas. In other countries such young men often inclined to Fascism, but in Albania Fascism was the creed of the foreign overlord and, in their search for faith and discipline, they therefore turned to the Communists. It is unlikely that there were ever more than two, or at the most three, thousand of these young men, but they were to be the backbone of the Communist organisation and the leaders under whom the landless peasants were organised. The combined discontent of these two classes — the youth of the towns and the landless peasants — produced a social revolutionary movement, which presently won the support of many of the richer peasants as well by its appeal to their patriotism or their land-hunger. This, in turn, provoked the more conservative elements to combine for the defence of their own interests; and so the general unrest among the Tosks was increased.

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The general poverty of the Albanians, their resentment of foreign rule, the anarchy and mercenary economy of the Ghegs, and the growth of a crisis in social relationships among the Tosks were thus the conditions out of which the Albanian resistance movement grew. Its several parts, though mainly nourished by domestic discontents, were soon invested with a pro-Allied and anti-Axis character by leaders who were variously animated by the desire to free their country, the hope of obtaining foreign support, and the opportunity of exploiting the popular hatred of the Italians. For long these different movements were but armed bands of outlaws, more concerned with maintaining themselves than with attacking the enemy. Nevertheless, as the prestige of the Italians declined with the succession of their defeats, so more and more people grew convinced that there was less to be feared from resistance than there was to be gained. Then, with the help of British and Communist agents,

Sons of the Eagle

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● 668 hearths at night. We watched their unfamiliar ways, studied
[662] their starkly realist opinions, and by a hundred different arguments preached war against the Germans. Abas Kupa meanwhile worked hard to strengthen his faction, rewarding friends, corrupting enemies, and gently menacing the undecided. Above all he sought to impose a truce between the warring clans whose blood feuds threatened the unity of the Zogist cause. The *Hakmeria*, or blood feud, had its merits, for it was a great teacher of manners and of respect for the dignity of the individual. No Albanian indeed could strike another with impunity, and even schoolmasters had been known to pay with their lives for a hasty cuff in class. But the feuds took a heavy toll of life and suffering; and we met men from weak clans who had scarcely left their homes in twenty years for fear of neighbours with whom they were "in blood". Under the monarchy some attempt had been made to suppress the feuds; and they had begun to decline before the growing power of the Central Government. With the collapse, however, of Italian rule the mountaineers had returned to their ancient anarchy, and now blood feuds flourished on every side. As foreigners we stood in no danger from them, but they were none the less an important factor in our daily life. A guide would take us several hours out of our way to avoid crossing the territory of a clan with which he was "in blood"; chieftains would suddenly postpone a meeting, alarmed by rumours that their enemies were lying in wait; and sometimes at tribal gatherings we would see a man pass the coffee cup to his neighbour under his knee — the supreme mark of contempt for the man who had not even tried to avenge a wrong.

628 The persistence of the blood feuds presented Abas Kupa with a serious problem, for every time a clan was won to his cause their blood enemies would side automatically with his rivals. He therefore laboured patiently to reconcile the contending parties, and in accordance with the Law of Lek invited them to submit their feuds to his arbitration. There was, moreover, an ancient tradition that a general truce, or *besa*, might be proclaimed like the medieval "Truce of God" if a region was

795banian writers, the Reverend Lazarus Shanjoha, to death. He
661 had favored close ties of friendship with Italy for many years,
and so the sentence was ascribed to the National Liberation
Front's fanatical detestation of all things Italian, and not to
antireligious prejudice.

653 Ilya Ehrenburg, major Soviet propagandist, visited Al-
668bania during the November of 1945. Upon his return to Mos-
687cow he described Scutari, more than half the population of
which was Roman Catholic, as a vicious hotbed of reaction.
At the time of his visit the city was preparing for its first post-
war elections. A handful of students at the diocesan seminary
for the training of priests circulated mimeographed sheets
urging that the recipients vote against the National Front.
These sheets bore the signature of the "Albanian Union."
Spurred on by Ehrenburg's denunciation, the government
jailed and tortured some of the distributors. They revealed
the names of the seminarians, who as a matter of fact con-
stituted the complete membership of the Albanian Union. A
spectacular trial of those held guilty of having plotted to over-
throw the State with the help of "Anglo-American imperial-
ists" became in reality a forum before which the Catholic
Church was indicted for high treason. The Rector of the
seminary and one of his fellow Jesuits were accused of re-
sponsibility for the conspiracy, found guilty, and executed.
Others received heavy prison sentences. Nowhere else had a
court acted more grimly.

653 The liquidation of virtually all Catholic activities followed
798 swiftly, with more cruel and vengeful treatment of the clergy
661 than has been witnessed even in Hungary and Yugoslavia.
The Papal Nuncio was expelled, as were all priests and re-
ligious born in Italy. Education was reserved to the State,
even nursery schools being taken from the Church. Catholic
Action was suppressed. The seminaries were closed. Ecclesias-